

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 680
By McNally

A RESOLUTION to honor the Green McAdoo Cultural Center and
commemorate the 50th anniversary of the
desegregation of Clinton High School.

WHEREAS, oftentimes it is forgotten that the history of Tennessee is the story of the
citizens of Tennessee, the struggles and efforts of real people and their communities, which
resonate down through the decades and must be passed on to the generations that follow; and

WHEREAS, the Fall of 2006 will mark the 50th anniversary of the "Walk down Foley Hill,"
when twelve African-American students walked into all-white Clinton High School for the first
time and into history as the first public school in the South to be integrated; and

WHEREAS, the courageous act of these students and the City of Clinton's efforts to
maintain honor and decency in a changing South, despite the intense outside pressure of
bigotry and hatred, is a story that must be preserved and shared; and

WHEREAS, in 1950, a lawsuit was filed in Federal court in Knoxville against the
Anderson County Board of Education, *McSwain v. Anderson County School Board*, asking for
an order to admit black students to Clinton High School on December 5, 1950; and

WHEREAS, utilizing the then existing "separate, but equal" doctrine, in 1952, Judge
Robert L. Taylor ruled in favor of the Anderson County Board of Education, and segregation in
Tennessee public school systems continued; and

WHEREAS, in January 1956, the United States District Court in Knoxville ruled that
based on the *Brown v. Board of Education* judgment of 1954, which overturned the "separate,
but equal" doctrine, the previous ruling in the *McSwain v. Anderson County School Board* was
invalid and Anderson County thus became the first public school system in the South to be
ordered to integrate under the landmark decision; and

WHEREAS, the Clinton community was relatively quiet the summer prior to school registration, and registration day was trouble free with 806 students enrolling at Clinton High School, including twelve African-American students: JoAnn Allen, Minnie Ann Dickey, Gail Ann Epps, William Robert Latham, Theresa Caswell, Robert Thacker, Maurice Soles, Alvah J. McSwain, Alfred Williams, Regina Turner, Bobby Cain, and Ronald Hayden; and

WHEREAS, those twelve courageous students gathered at Green McAdoo School and walked half a mile to attend their hometown high school; previously, to attend high school, they had no choice but to ride a bus for sixteen miles to an African-American high school in Knoxville; and

WHEREAS, public interest in the story brought national attention, and troublemakers from across the country gathered in Clinton to protest the new education equality doctrine; the mob, which grew to over 1,000 in less than a week, terrorized the African-American community, community leaders, and the downtown Clinton area; and

WHEREAS, seeking to squelch the mob and its violent tendencies, Mayor Everett Lewallen put out a call to the citizens of Clinton to form a "Home Guard" to augment Clinton's small police force and aid in restoring law and order to the community. Forty volunteers offered their assistance to protect the community, at one point using tear gas and forming a phalanx to move the mob of 1,500 off the courthouse square; and

WHEREAS, in the African-American neighborhood surrounding the Green McAdoo School, another "Home Guard" was formed to protect the citizens of the neighborhood, which had been subjected to acts of escalating violence, including dynamite blasts on private property and Ku Klux Klan marches; and

WHEREAS, just as the mob was getting out of control at the end of the first week, 100 State Troopers of the Tennessee Highway Patrol, under the command of Greg O'Rear, arrived to restore peace for the evening and the next morning under the orders of Governor Frank G. Clement; and

WHEREAS, abiding by the law of the land at a time when other Southern governors had defied it, Governor Frank G. Clement also ordered 600 Tennessee National Guardsmen to

Clinton under the command of Major General Joseph Henry, Jr.; the soldiers arrived with tanks to maintain order on the city's streets, which were then under martial law; and

WHEREAS, the mob was ultimately squelched, and with public support in Clinton very high for Principal Douglas Brittain and the peaceful integration of the school, classes continued although segregationists continued to engage in intimidation tactics, including cross burnings at the homes of school faculty members and local civic leaders, shots fired at the home of two African-American students, and dynamite blasts; and

WHEREAS, the courts next took action with U.S. District Court Judge Robert L. Taylor issuing an injunction forbidding interference with desegregation, resulting in sixteen agitators being arrested and arraigned in U.S. District Court; and

WHEREAS, with peace restored, life returned to normal in Clinton and, in the spring of 1957, Bobby Cain became the first African-American student to graduate from an integrated, Southern public school when he received his diploma from Clinton High School; and

WHEREAS, early in the morning on Sunday, October 5, 1958, Clinton High School was bombed, with the school suffering extensive damage; the event galvanized public opinion in the community against violence. The perpetrator was never caught; and

WHEREAS, the neighboring community of Oak Ridge offered an empty elementary school, Linden Elementary, to the students of Clinton, and in exactly one week parents, students, teachers, and community activists reconditioned and outfitted the abandoned school; and

WHEREAS, the students of Clinton High, both black and white, loaded buses at the site of their decimated school building and rode to their new school in Oak Ridge one week to the day that Clinton High School was destroyed, where they were greeted by the Oak Ridge High Band in full regalia playing Clinton High's Alma Mater; and

WHEREAS, the passage of time has seen the City of Clinton continue to grow and prosper with new generations of citizens, and those turbulent events of the past that saw the community unite to support educational equality for all should be especially marked and lauded; and

WHEREAS, in 2004, a group of former students, concerned that the Green McAdoo school building was in danger of being torn down, united and formed the Green McAdoo Cultural Organization to preserve and promote the history of the courageous twelve students and the community of Clinton, Tennessee, during the desegregation crisis; and

WHEREAS, paying tribute to the twelve students who gathered at Green McAdoo School and walked together to Clinton High School into unknown consequences and history, and gathering that record through first-hand knowledge of the events will make the Green McAdoo Cultural Center a truly special and remarkable facility; and

WHEREAS, the Green McAdoo Cultural Center will serve as a museum/library facility to exhibit an historically accurate depiction of those events and their impact on the State of Tennessee, the United States, and the world; the site has recently been listed on the National Historic Register and has been nominated as a National Historic Site; and

WHEREAS, through strong community efforts and the valiant determination of numerous individuals, the Green McAdoo Cultural Center is scheduled for a Grand Opening on August 26, 2006 – the 50th anniversary of the first public school integration in the South; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we join with the citizens of Clinton, Tennessee, as they celebrate the opening of the Green McAdoo Cultural Center on August 26, 2006, and pay respectful tribute to the original twelve African-American students and the good people of Clinton who stood up for education equality for all mankind.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.